



Montana School for the Deaf and Blind

School Accreditation Report

March 13-15, 2006

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Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

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INTRODUCTION

In fulfillment of the requirements to be accredited the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind hosted a visitation for representatives from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), the National Accreditation Council *for Agencies serving People with Blindness or Visual Impairment* (NAC), and the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS). The purpose of the visit was to validate the programs and performance of the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind.

The following represents the observations and conclusions of the Visitation Team. It is expected that the staff, administration and directors of the school will review and analyze the content of this report and use the counsel provided to correct deficiencies, if any, and improve upon the various functions and purposes of the school. This is necessary to ensure continued membership in CEASD, NAC, and NAAS as an accredited school.

The report was written to include all aspects and observations of the visitation by the three accrediting agencies. The CEASD and NAC acronyms appear throughout the document to indicate specific statements made by their accrediting representatives. Not all areas were reviewed equally by all parties. NAAS concurs with the statements made by CEASD and NAC giving respect to their professional expertise and experience. NAAS responses, comments, and suggestions are not specified in the document. NAAS is the agency responsible for preparing the completed document, and, therefore, takes responsibility for all statements and observations made.

SECTION I: THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS REPORT

Part 1: Development of the Student and Community Profile

Principle:

The profile should be a compilation of available data concerning student performance, school climate, school organization, school personnel, community demographics and any external factors which may impact the educational process.

It is important that the staff realizes that identification and interpretation of this data is more important than the collection and reporting of it. This is the part of the task that gives meaning to the collection as it relates to school goals and desired learner results.

Persons responsible for the development of the students and community profile information should be aware that they may be called upon at any point of the school improvement process for additional information, clarification of information, and judgment related to existing or developed information.

Analysis and Counsel:

A great deal of enlightening and meaningful data has been collected and compiled to produce a profile of the community, school, students and staff. The data incorporates information from and about all stakeholders. It presents a comprehensive beginning from which data expansion can be accomplished.

The staff is commended for addressing problems of some sensitivity in such an open and inquiring fashion and for demonstrating care in its representation of particular constituents in nonjudgmental, comprehensive, and meaningful ways.

Staff-wide knowledge and acceptance of the profile data are essential in order for all to understand the focus of the improvement goals and to buy into the interventions prescribed by the SIP. It appears that the staff is aware of (a) the profile data, (b) how it impacted the determination of the mission, beliefs, and educational goals of the school and (c) the connection to focus goals. Keep up the good work.

Suggestions:

1. It may be helpful to put data in a format that lends itself to annual collections and additions. A PowerPoint presentation is sometimes workable because slides can be inserted where desired and they can be sorted to extrapolate information needed at any time.
2. It may be helpful over time to have archive copies of the data collection detailing how, by whom, and when the data was collected as well as the sources of the information. Over time these details will be forgotten and there will be no process to ensure that you are collecting comparable information.

Part 2: School Goals and Objectives

Principle:

Goals and Objectives should represent the majority thinking of the entire school community and focus on the total school program. They should serve as the stimulus for creating understandings, desires and opportunities for supportive activities.

The goals and objectives listed below are the agency goals required by the State of Montana Legislative Services Division. They are developed through strategic planning and are reviewed on a regular basis.

Education

Goals

The goal of the Education Program is to extend to all children their rightful heritage - an educational program so planned, adapted, and conducted as to provide all children the education and opportunity to take their rightful place in a democratic society. Fundamentally, the purpose of education for the deaf and hard of hearing and blind and low vision child is to attain attitudes and understanding, skills and abilities, and knowledge which make it possible for them to become self-supporting, contributing members of society.

Objectives

- **Identification and Tracking** – to maintain a system for tracking a child identified as hearing impaired or visually impaired from the time of identification through the child's exit from intervention or education services.
- **Parent Support** - to provide parent services inclusive of information referral, counseling to help the family adjust to their child's hearing or visual impairment, and to assist parents as they participate in the educational planning and programming for their child.
- **Early Intervention** - to provide early educational intervention to the hearing or visually impaired preschool child in the home to minimize educational delay.
- **Preschool Services** – to provide classroom based intervention services which support the unique communication needs of preschool children who live in the Great Falls area.
- **Specialized Services** - to provide specialized assessments and educational services germane to the handicapped child's condition, including language acquisition, speech development, and maximum use of residual hearing and vision.
- **Core Educational Program** - to provide students with a comprehensive educational and instructional program from preschool to 12th grade that includes extracurricular activities, social education, athletics, vocational education, and support services comparable to educational opportunities afforded to non-handicapped children.

- **Employability and Transition** - to provide students, through the age of 21, with life skills training and vocational education which will enable them to make enlightened choices regarding a vocation and post secondary training, to develop marketable skills for employment, and to have the independent living skills necessary to function as self-supporting members of their communities.
- **Outreach Services** - to provide consultative services to serve as a resource center providing information, technical assistance, and leadership to: (1) parents of deaf and blind children from birth through age 21; (2) public schools of Montana who have deaf and blind children enrolled; and (3) organizations and individuals concerned with services to deaf and blind children.

Student Services

Goals

The goal of the Student Services Program is to provide students with comprehensive residential facilities, including child care services, health services, recreational services and social education, which includes social adjustment training and self-concept development.

Objectives

- To provide opportunities for hearing impaired and visually impaired students to grow into mature, independent young adults with the ability to manage decision making situations.
- To support the education process in areas of total communication, concept development and orientation and mobility.
- To provide for the development of motor skills, and understanding fair play and the development of healthy bodies through sports and recreational activities.
- To provide for the development of healthy self concept with each student through a supportive, warm, loving and understanding environment.
- To correlate activities in the Residential Program with those which are provided in the classrooms.

Administration

Goals

The goal of the Administration Program is to provide effective leadership of the School, manage financial affairs of the School in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, and maximize the most efficient use of public funds in educating sensory impaired children.

Objectives

- **Leadership** - to provide effective leadership for the total school program including administration, education, student services and general services.

- **Supervision** - to provide general supervision for the total school program and direct supervision for the heads of departments.
- **Evaluation** - to develop, implement and maintain an employee evaluation system for the total school program including the heads of departments which will assist employees to grow and develop professionally.
- **Business Affairs** - to conduct the business affairs of the school (including accounting, purchasing and personnel management) in accordance with Montana statutes, the Montana Operations Manual, Board of Public Education policies and procedures and generally accepted accounting and business practices.
- **Budgeting** - to prepare biennial budgetary estimates and projections as required and as requested; to prepare annual budgetary documents and information as needed; to maintain and disseminate budget status reports; and to render final accounting summaries at the end of each fiscal year.
- **Grant Applications** - to prepare applications for federal funding of special projects; to maintain accounting records and budgetary documentation relating to federally funded projects; to render final accounting summaries at the end of each fiscal year.
- **Legislative Interaction** - to establish and maintain a cordial working relationship with the Great Falls area delegation and other members of the state legislature.
- **Interagency Interaction** - to establish and maintain a close working relationship with other state and federal agencies.
- **Local School District** - to establish and maintain a working relationship with local school districts from which M.S.D.B. students originate and with local school districts in which M.S.D.B. outreach students reside.
- **Constituent Communication** - to establish and maintain open lines of communication with the various constituencies of the school including, but not limited to, the Montana Association of the Deaf, the Montana Association of the Blind, the Alumni Association and the parents of students past, present and future.
- **Public Relations** - to establish and maintain an effective public relations effort to ensure that the general public is aware of the school and its programs and that publicity about the school in the print and broadcast media is accurate.

General Services

Goals

The goal of the General Services Program is to provide cost effective maintenance of campus grounds, buildings and equipment; to maintain a safe, clean and visually pleasing environment for students to live and learn in; and to assure compliance with applicable building and health codes.

Objectives

- **Building Maintenance** - to support the total school program through the establishment of an ongoing program of maintenance and repair of all school buildings to ensure that classrooms, cottages and other areas are attractive, safe and comfortable for use and enjoyment by students and staff.
- **Custodial Service** - to support the total school program through the provision of daily custodial service to school buildings to ensure that they are clean, sanitary and comfortable for use by students and staff.
- **Vehicle Maintenance** - to support the total school program through the establishment of an ongoing program of school vehicle maintenance and repair to ensure that the vehicles are safe and dependable for use by staff.
- **Grounds Maintenance** - to establish an ongoing program of grounds maintenance including, but not limited to, the watering and mowing of grassy areas, and the removal of snow and ice accumulations.

The goals listed below are the SIP goals of the MSDB.

BEHAVIOR GOAL

To foster independence in our students, they will accept responsibility for their own behavior and deal safely with and show respect for self, others and property.

Goal #1:

There will be a 5% decrease each year in the number of student incident reports as measured by school data collection beginning the spring of 2006.

CURRENT STATUS:

MSDB does not currently have an adopted a school-wide behavior rubric to measure students. Current decisions have been made based on our Progressive Discipline Plan and our incident report forms. Baseline data based on a behavior rubric will be obtained spring of 2003.

2003-2004: MSDB began the process of developing school-wide rules and consequences during this school year. Those will be implemented in the 2004-2005 school year. Various staff received introductory training to behavior programs such as Best Behavior and MBI. After MSDB staff and administration identified current students' needs and reviewed behavior data from the past year, it was determined that changes in the recording and reporting procedures were needed. These changes will be implemented during the 2004-2005 school year. It is anticipated that there will be an actual increase in the number of incident reports due to the change in procedure. Baseline data will be obtained during the 2004-2005 school year.

2004-2005: The Student Incident Report form was revised at the beginning of the year and baseline data gathered on the number of reports written. In a preliminary analysis of the data, an apparent rise in reports is in part attributed to better and more consistent

reporting by staff of student violations against the code of conduct, particularly in the area of insubordination in the classroom. The "Stop and Think" social skills program, initiated during the 2004-2005 school year, was used in the education department and in the residential program. Principal's club and the Dean's club were also used to reinforce positive behaviors. These programs will continue to be used during the 2005-2006 school year.

COMMUNICATION GOAL

To develop and maintain effective interpersonal communication and supportive relationships between administration, staff, parents, students and the Greater School Community (GSC).

Goal #1:

The school will identify and develop methods for clear and effective communication that will improve student learning, support parent involvement, facilitate two-way communication and inform our constituents by 2005

Goal #2:

The school will implement methods for clear and effective communication that will improve student learning, support parent involvement, facilitate two-way communication and inform our constituents by 2006

CURRENT STATUS:

MSDB surveyed students, education staff, parents, and the GSC during the winter of 2003. There was a common thread identified while analyzing survey data. A need for clear and effective communication among all groups was identified. The school currently has regular communication with parents via monthly travel letters home, grade reports, participation in IEP meetings and quarterly newsletters. Because over 50 % of the students live on campus, many parents don't have daily contact with their children. Education staff meetings are conducted at least monthly. There are also a variety of work meetings conducted on an on-going basis addressing curriculum, student needs, and other educational issues. MSDB Foundation Board meets on a quarterly basis with the school administration. Our governing board (Board of Public Education) meets on a regular basis. MSDB administration and staff interact with the GSC on an on-going basis.

2003-2004: A communication committee was established and began the process of identifying communication needs and barriers. This work will continue into the next school year. The action plan strategies dealing with job descriptions and staff evaluation processes have been removed due to pending changes in the overall descriptions and evaluation processes. The administration is addressing these issues at the present time and therefore these strategies cannot be carried out. Limited resources have made it necessary to suspend work on the comprehensive language assessment process. This process will be continued at a later date.

A new website has been designed and will be in use for the 2004-2005 school year. A weekly letter home to parents will also facilitate communication between the school staff, students and parents.

2004-2005: Goal #1 - During the 2004-05 school year several strategies were identified as effective ways to increase and improve communication. These strategies included incorporating a weekly newsletter to parents, using email/phone calls to communicate information about students, and using email/phone calls to facilitate two-way communication with constituents. The cumulative information collected over the past three years has given MSDB a variety of methods with which to address the second communication goal of implementation; therefore this goal has been met.

Goal #2 - During the 2004-05 school year "MSDB Happenings", a newsletter from the students & staff, was sent home weekly. A new website was developed with new areas that reflected current events at the school as well as student work. Parent volunteers assisted in calling to encourage participation in school and cottage surveys. Changes in the incident reporting procedure were made to better communicate to staff, students and parents about situations occurring in the school and cottage settings. Outreach consultants made goals to increase their communication with parents by participating in newsletters and contacting parents prior to traveling in their areas.

To facilitate more effective communication among the staff members fall in-service training will include a half day workshop on best practices for communication. In addition, there will be specific times regularly scheduled throughout the school year to allow teachers time to work together in teams and share information.

CURRICULUM/ASSESSMENT GOAL

Students will achieve at or above the proficient level on local assessments in all curricular subjects and on the ITBS/Montana Measured Progress Test in 2014.

Goal #1:

One hundred percent of MSDB academic curricula will be aligned with GTCC [and Montana] curricula and assessments, and intent of implementation in each teacher's lesson planning will be verified, by fall of 2007.

Goal #2:

50% of students in the 4th, 8th, 10th and 11th grades will perform at the proficient level on a math criterion and/or norm referenced test(s) in the area of Problem Solving by 2007.

Goal #3:

50% of students in the 4th, 8th, 10th and 11th grades will perform at the proficient level on a reading criterion and/or norm referenced test(s) by 2007.

CURRENT STATUS:

MSDB has recently become a member of the GTCC and has not verified how GTCC Curricula aligns with the school's current curricula. Teachers have not had an opportunity to incorporate GTCC Curricula in their lesson planning. Outside of GTCC

and Montana Standards academic curricula, MSDB deals with other curriculum areas that are disability specific such as, Braille, Orientation and Mobility, Expanded Core Curriculum for the Blind and Sign Language.

Given the small student numbers, the data reported back on ITBS/ITED is not statistically relevant. Several of our classes had less than 6 students. In analyzing the data, identified areas of need included reading, language and math. However, in meeting with our teachers there was consensus that the focus should be on math in the areas of concepts, estimation and problem solving. Due to the impact of deafness and blindness on language development and learning, reading and language are two areas that need and receive on-going emphasis within the instructional program.

2003-2004: MSDB began the process of aligning our curricula with that of GTCC. The 6 X 6 curriculum grids used to track completions of goals proved to be somewhat problematic. A student curriculum report has been designed and will be used to track progress during the 2004-2005 school year.

April 2005 Rewrite: Since the January AYP designation, MSDB has rewritten the math goal and has added a reading goal to be included in the 5-year CEP. The action plans for these objectives include using several strategies and programs that are research-based and have been developed to build student skills in the areas of reading and mathematics.

2004-2005: Goal #1 - During the 2004-05 school year teachers began using curriculum reports to record and track student progress in at least two of their classes. On-going staff discussion and team work has been conducted during the 2004-05 school year regarding the development and use of the curriculum reports. This collaboration has led to modifications in the form that will be implemented during the 2005-06 school year.

Goal #2 - During the 2004-05 school year teachers on a math committee selected the 5-Step Problem Solving Plan included in the Harcourt Brace, Math Advantage text as the foundation for problem solving activities designed to increase student skills. A rubric to assist in the assessment of student problem solving skills was developed in the spring of 2005 and will be used in assessing students beginning fall of 2005. Students will participate in a weekly problem solving lesson/activity involving this 5-Step plan.

Goal #3 - MSDB identified two programs that address reading deficits for our specific needs. Read Naturally and the Fairview reading programs were selected to address student needs and will be implemented beginning fall of 2005. Read Naturally is a research-based program that combines three proven strategies for developing reading fluency. The program was used this year with several students who demonstrated a significant increase in their fluency rates. Comprehension skills will also be tracked during the 2005-06 school year.

Fairview Reading is a research supported program that has been developed specifically to assist hard of hearing and deaf students increase their reading skills. This program will be used weekly in the Hearing Impaired language arts classes.

Analysis and Counsel:

1. Staff, students, and community representatives should be involved in the process that leads to identification of the Goals and Objectives advocated by the school.
2. Each Goal and Objective represents the most appropriate or ideal condition for learning whether or not it represents the school's present status. This demonstrates a genuine interest of the stakeholders to promote school improvement.

Suggestions:

1. The Educational Goals and Objectives should be annually reconfirmed by the stakeholders and clarified by the SIP Committee in order to insure that they remain meaningful throughout the process and that they foster a clear understanding to anyone who reads them.

Commendations:

1. The SIP Goals are comprehensive and specific. Continue to analyze annually and make necessary adjustments.

Part 3: Vision and Mission Statement

Principle:

The Vision and Mission Statement should be a concise statement that reflects the Goals and Objectives of the school. The statement should be a collective vision that motivates and inspires to give clear purpose and direction to the school. It should be easily understood by all and should be the school's "Call to action."

Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind Vision and Mission

"Education, Communication and Independence for Life."

The vision of the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is to promote and maintain excellent and comprehensive educational opportunities for every deaf, hard-of-hearing, blind, low vision and deaf-blind child in Montana which shall lead to the highest potential for adult life of independence and self-sufficiency; a meaningful personal, family and community life; and a useful, productive occupational life.

As part of Montana's educational system, the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is committed to promote and provide free and appropriate educational opportunities statewide, for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, low vision and deaf-blind ages birth to twenty-one. This comprehensive education ensures these children achieve their greatest potential for independence and success.

Analysis and Counsel:

The vision and mission statement is comprehensive and shows that efforts and decisions made in the school must be geared toward meeting students' future needs as well as present demands. The staff has been actively involved and is openly supportive of the mission.

Suggestions:

Continue your efforts to publicize your vision, mission and goals to community, parents, staff and especially students. Students' knowledge of what and why they are addressing certain issues can be your biggest ally. When they make the connection the circuit will be complete for continual improvement.

Part 4: Development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

Principle:

The SIP must include any element of the school program that has been identified and prioritized for attention in the next three to five years. Judgments about the effectiveness of the interventions or action plan components by the school as a whole are the final objectives of the SIP.

Only when critiques related to present performance levels and future goals or potentials are made, is the process going to result in meaningful change for students and the school.

An internal annual review and consideration of whether additions might be appropriate are strongly suggested. A school who waits for *perfection* in one area before beginning to focus attention on another will find itself forever working in one area alone. There is no Finish line in the business of education.

Analysis and Counsel:

The school is focused and responsive the needs of the students. The direction of the school is positive.

Suggestion:

Be sure to include students and parents in the process. Surveys provide input from which you can make judgments, however personal involvement of the students and parents will result in an understanding of the process and the direction of the school.

SECTION 2: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS OF THE CEASD, NAC, and NAAS

Principle:

It is important that school personnel always remember that Standards I - XI are still in effect and are liable for consideration by the Visitation Team at a later time. Self-evaluation of the school's status in these areas is continually needed and attention to any deviations must be prompt and effective.

Standard I--Educational Program

Principle:

An effective school has a clearly written statement of philosophy and objectives for directing its educational programs and processes. Effective schools will also have an appropriate program of studies and provisions for the infusion of technology into the curriculum. The educational program of a school must recognize and provide for the individual needs, interests, and abilities of all students. The school should be concerned not only with accumulation of knowledge, development of skills, and improvement of understanding, but also with the development of interests, tastes, appreciations, ideals and attitudes, and the functioning of these elements in a democratic society. The maximum development of each student mentally, socially, physically and emotionally, is facilitated by a balanced program of appropriate school experiences.

Visitation Response:

Evidence from discussions with teachers, support staff and administrators showed shared high expectations for the students they serve. The Mission, Beliefs and Vision of the school appears to be accepted and supported in providing needed services including the use of a school wide curriculum and flexibility in its use for students having a wide range of abilities. - CEASD

MSDB has seven outreach consultants on staff who work from locations across the state. Outreach services staff consult in all areas of low vision and blindness. These include assessment, functional vision, Orientation & Mobility, specialized learning media, instruction in Braille, input into the development of IEPs, in-services training for LEA staff, general technical assistance, ordering of materials and equipment. Consultants are also involved in Family Learning Weekends, Enrichment Weekends, Summer Programs, and "Games for the Visually Impaired" activities. - NAC

The MSDB outreach program has two additional consultants that serve families and district with children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. Services include consultation on IEPs, in-services training for LEA staff, technical assistance, involvement in Family

Learning weekends and summer camps, and the development of Family Advisor Service Plans for home-based services.

MSDB VI program serves blind and low vision students from age 3 thru 21. Students range from severely disabled to college bound. Some students are enrolled as day students; some are also in the residential program. Through an Inter-agency Agreement with the Great Falls Public Schools, some students are dually enrolled at MSDB and selected schools within the public school district. - NAC

At the present, time 8 students have been identified to take the alternate CRT. All students have individual education programs which determine their placement and program on a year to year basis. Students with multiple disabilities are all day students as their needs exceed the resources in the residential program.

The teaching team includes an Orientation and Mobility Specialist, a Rehabilitation teacher, an Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech Pathologist, and an individual who works with assistive technology.

Commendations:

1. The staff and administration are commended for the high expectations for the education of the students they serve. - CEASD
2. The professional growth opportunities for the certified staff members are commendable. - CEASD
3. The involvement of the MSDB in providing students with expanded opportunities in public school academic and vocational classes is excellent. - CEASD
4. Instructional and assessment systems are in place for the development of instructional strategies. This is done in conjunction with the school psychologist who does educational evaluations and teachers who design their own end of unit evaluations. - CEASD
5. Local schools serving students with visual impairments may borrow adaptive hardware and software for evaluation purposes and that training in the use of adaptive technology is provided to district staff and parents throughout the state. -NAC
6. There is evidence of a strong formal and positive relationship with early intervention providers throughout the state. - NAC
7. The teachers and specialists in the blind program work as an effective team to enhance services to students and address the needs of the whole child. - NAC
8. Students have access to a variety of communication modes specifically designed to meet individual needs. - NAC

Recommendations:

1. It is strongly suggested that the school post the Mission, Beliefs and Vision Statements in every classroom and dormitory common areas as well as including them in publications and other information shared with parents and others. CEASD
2. The administration continue to find ways to provide salaries for certified staff members which are equal to Great Falls Public School staff having similar experience and credentials. CEASD
3. The MSDB administration consider placing computers in classrooms so students can work independently during times when the teacher is working with other students. Computers would permit teachers and students to better accommodate individual differences in learning styles and rates of learning. CEASD
4. The administration adopt a schedule for the replacement of text books and other teaching materials as they become obsolete. (The social studies text books should be updated.) CEASD
5. MSDB should aggressively develop an assessment system ranging from the use of criterion and norm referenced tests, alternate tests utilized by the school psychologist and student personal alternate assessment portfolios. Having a comprehensive assessment system in place will enable the curriculum coordinator, school psychologist and teachers set expectations and plan instructional units specific to each child's level of development. CEASD
6. Once fully developed and clearly defined, a comprehensive assessment system will expand MSDB's role as a statewide resource related to academic assessment of deaf and hard of hearing children in the state. CEASD
7. A single, appropriate assessment should be used to create a baseline and measure progress of students with multiple disabilities who require alternative assessments. NAC
8. Use the position of rehabilitation teacher to further enhance communication and coordination of life skills training between the educational program and the residential program. NAC

Standard II--Student Personnel Services

Principle:

Student personnel services are those services designed to give systematic assistance to students. An effective program of student personnel services facilitates the total development of each student.

Visitation Response:

CEASD - Interviews with support staff members and administrators indicate that they have a school which provides services to students that optimize their preparation for learning. Chief among them are guidance, including academic and health services. Staff members are well informed regarding health and safety policies. Individual differences among the student population are identified and appropriate services are provided.

NAC -The residential program serves students who reside in Montana and out of state students on a case by case basis. At this time there are 10 blind students and 20 deaf and hard-of-hearing students residing on campus. The students are grouped according to age and gender, with deaf and blind students sharing dorm wings. Day students often stay in the residence cottages when taking part in after school activities.

The Health Services Program is directed by a registered nurse and staffed by licensed practical nurses. Health care is provided by scheduled and on-call staff 24 hours a day.

The Recreation program is designed to provide activities after school and weekends. A Recreation Specialist manages the program on a daily basis and an Athletic Director is responsible for competitive activities.

Commendations:

1. The MSDB administration is commended for providing the students with an excellent group of professionals who provide a comprehensive array of services to the students they serve. CEASD
2. The school's health and safety procedures are well organized with issues reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis. CEASD
3. Appropriate staff individuals are involved during intake and admission of new students. CEASD
4. Individual Education Plans are written at meetings with parents as partners in the process. Reviews of the plans occur on a regular basis with adjustments made as needed. CEASD

5. The school is well connected with the community and makes good uses of services public agencies provide for students including public health, mental health, child protective services, vocational rehabilitation, law enforcement and other important support when requested. CEASD
6. The MSDB administration is commended for being a member of the Golden Triangle Curriculum Cooperative which has resulted in needed adjustments to the curriculum provided for the students. CEASD
7. The impressive transition program begins prior to students entering high school and results for many as they are placed into community businesses and experience the responsibilities of holding jobs. CEASD
8. The audiologist is well qualified and has a huge caseload. She tests both deaf and blind students annually as well as conducting assessments for health providers, audiologists and speech pathologists. The school is commended for providing such comprehensive audiologist services for the community and the MSDB student population. CEASD
9. Consultants are highly regarded in the state for providing timely assessment, participating on IEP teams and supporting local schools with technical support to students. NAC

Recommendations:

1. It is strongly recommended that MSDB employ a certified counselor and provide direct services to students who need support. Teachers and other staff members should refer students in need of social, emotional, or behavioral services to a certified school counselor. CEASD
2. MSDB, in order to ensure the safety of its students, must establish a working partnership with a Crisis Intervention Team in the Great Falls Community to do suicide assessments when signs of suicidal ideation are manifested. CEASD
3. It is suggested that the administration study the transition program to see if additional job coaches are needed. CEASD

Standard III--School Plant and Equipment

Principle:

The school plant, consisting of site, buildings, equipment, and services, is an important factor in the functioning of the educational program. The school plant serves as a vehicle for the implementation of the school mission. The school plant would provide for a variety of instructional activities and programs and for the health and safety of ALL persons. The school plant should incorporate aesthetic features which contribute to a positive educational atmosphere while providing for needed flexibility.

Visitation Response:

CEASD - During the four days of campus visitation the team members had opportunities to visit all areas of the campus and to observe all plant facilities.

NAC - The blind education program is housed in Aspen Hall which is located on the west side of the campus. The building includes space for classrooms, offices and physical education/therapies. Students move during the day to the dining room, library and other campus locations.

Commendations:

1. The facilities are clean and well maintained. There are several needs, but the administration is fully aware of these and continues to seek funding to make plant improvements. CEASD
2. The School has a newly created Safety Committee representing all program areas which meets on a regular basis to insure that policies, procedures and training are current and being followed and implemented. CEASD
3. Through efforts of the administration, the school has secured funding from the legislature for maintenance and repair. This will allow the campus to address day-to-day projects in a timely manner, reducing the need for costly replacement. NAC
4. Replacement of carpeting in Bitterroot Hall and rearrangement of the library/media center have improved the overall function and aesthetics of the building. NAC
5. Purchase of lifts and mat tables for the blind program have improved safety for both students and staff. NAC

Recommendations:

1. As the modifications are made to the hallway outside the blind classrooms, attention should be paid to both natural and ceiling light in the classrooms to maximize students' visual functioning. In addition, the hallway should be designed to improve independent mobility for the students. NAC
2. Improve the overall aesthetics of the building housing the blind program to enhance its status commensurate with the other educational buildings on the campus and provide signage that clearly this as an educational building. NAC

Standard IV--Library Media/Technology Program

Principle:

The library media program is an integral part of the school. The school library media program ensures that appropriate learning activities are provided that will enable students and staff to become effective, independent users of ideas and information for lifelong learning.

Visitation Response:

Interviews with members of MSDB and review of relevant documentation show that MSDB has set down an infrastructure positioning the school to implement new Library Media technology to achieve its educational mission both as a school and through outreach services provided in the state of Montana. For the present and future generations of deaf and hard of hearing students served at MSDB and in public schools throughout the state, it is imperative that they become proficient in the use of computers as a tool in the areas of communication as well as research as life-long learners. The value of the computer as a portal into the greater community and the world of work cannot be understated.

Commendations:

1. MSDB's Library Media program is a valuable resource center for the school and Montana. The school librarian, teachers, curriculum planner and principal work closely together to update the library collection and discuss needed purchases of books and other library media relevant to curricular goals each year. CEASD
2. The school library is networked on the interlibrary loan system and the school website, making it possible for a larger pool of consumers to tap into this unique state resource. CEASD
3. MSDB has a systemic and comprehensive technology plan and K-12 Technology Curriculum based on the Golden Triangle Curriculum cooperative. CEASD

Recommendations:

1. Within the MSDB 5YCEP the school administration needs to develop the library budget, enabling the library to update the non-fiction collection to meet the school's curricular objectives as well as promote the development of a strong literacy program. CEASD
2. The interlibrary loan system is not accessed as much as it could be at this time. It is recommended that public relations strategies to disseminate information in this area targeting special education directors, teachers of the deaf and other service providers in addition to parents be implemented. CEASD

3. The Technology Plan is an integral part of the school and teachers should be trained to effectively integrate technology into the instructional curriculum. CEASD
4. Teachers, support service professionals and administrators should make use of email as a part of the school system when communicating with students. CEASD
5. MSDB should investigate cost savings that can be achieved for the school and local school districts by using its technology resources to establish and maintain an inventory and clearing house for texts in alternative formats, as well as equipment and software adapted for the sensory impaired purchased by MSDB and local schools. (TI 2, 9) NAC
6. Catalogue the blind program professional library and major teaching materials through the library. NAC
7. Continue to build a library collection to meet the needs of students who use Braille, audio, or large print books to support the SIP goal of improving reading. NAC

Standard V--Records

Principle:

The maintenance, handling, and protection of student records is essential to the management of the school and is required in the interests of the students and parents.

Visitation Response:

A review of a random sample of student records show that MSDB has been diligent in keeping comprehensive student records and ensuring that safeguards as mandated by FERPA were implemented. They are located in the outer area near the Principal's Office and monitored by the principal's administrative assistant.

Commendations:

1. All records reviewed were in order and individual student information was well organized and easy to access. CEASD

Recommendations:

Standard VI--School Improvement

Principle:

The continual improvement of the educational program is essential in providing quality results. Innovative, exemplary, and experimental programs, coupled with teacher improvement programs and public participation in planning distinguish good schools. Successful improvement programs focus on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding student performance, coupled with an examination of the extent to which instructional and organizational practices within the school are aligned in support of student learning objectives and the mission of the school, are essential when developing a comprehensive school improvement plan.

Visitation Response:

The team received a copy of the FIVE YEAR COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION PLAN prior to arrival and, therefore, had ample time to review it and then to discuss it with stakeholders during the on-site visit. CEASD

The MSDB was established in 1893, and is governed by the Board of Public Education. The Board has specified the functions of the school as: assessment, specialized educational instruction, and residential placement in order to provide an education commensurate with education provided to non-disabled children of the state. Services include support to parents, consultation, training and technical assistance to public schools in the state, information and referral services to other agencies and tracking of children until they exit from education/intervention services. The school has established policies and planning processes to carry forth these functions and is monitored by the Board and the Office of Public Instruction. Appropriate agreements have been written to assure that children from birth to through age 21 have access to the services expected by the governing Board. NAC

Commendations:

1. The School volunteered (actually requested that they be included) to develop their school improvement plan as required by the Montana Office of Public Instruction of all public schools in Montana. CEASD
2. MSDB has regular and meaningful communication with other state agencies which contributes to its potential significant role in developing and providing state-wide services to deaf and blind children and their families. CEASD
3. All persons interviewed (6 telephone and personal interviews) as well as eight responders representing separate agencies gave compliments about their experiences with the school in a confidential written questionnaire. NAC

4. The goals in the SIP are being addressed in the blind program and supported through training of personnel and appropriate materials. NAC

Recommendations:

Standard VII--Preparation of Personnel

Principle:

The quality of education is directly related to the personnel who guide and operate the educational programs. The education, experience, and competence of personnel are important factors. How these individuals work together to provide a cohesive and positive learning environment is also important.

Visitation Response:

CEASD - MSDB has identified 4 major areas needed for in-service preparation of personnel:

- Curriculum/Assessment
- Communication
- Behavior
- Paraprofessional Development

Curriculum and Assessment work will tie in to current research based strategies as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. The use of instructional technology will be integrated into the curriculum.

NAC - MSDB has seven outreach consultants on staff who work from locations across the state. Outreach services consult in all areas of low vision and blindness. These include assessment, functional vision, Orientation & Mobility, specialized learning media, instruction in Braille, input into the development of IEPs, in-services training for LEA staff, general technical assistance, ordering of materials and equipment. Consultants are also involved in Family Learning Weekends, Enrichment Weekends, Summer Programs, and "Games for the Visually Impaired" activities.

All children, ages 0 to 5, which have a visual impairment and reside in Montana are eligible for services from MSDB consultants. Visually impaired infants are either referred to MSDB by pediatricians or early intervention service providers or local school districts. This may include children who have multiple disabilities in addition to a visual impairment. Infants are served in the home, often in collaboration with other agencies. Preschoolers may be served in the home or in their preschool setting. Modeling teaching strategies for parents and professionals working with blind infants and preschoolers provides concrete examples of successful techniques, language, and curriculum. MSDB works as a technical resource to the parents and Part C providers. The Outreach Consultant will assess the student and determine the level of service. Outreach Consultants also act as resources for information and materials.

The programs for the blind at MSDB have well qualified staff that hold state certification or state special education endorsements and most have completed a recognized

university training program to be teachers of the visually impaired. In addition to the instructional staff there are appropriate levels of service from licensed support staff including OT, PT, Speech, Orientation and Mobility and transition services. During the current year 4 new positions have been added to the outreach program permitting significant reductions in caseload and opportunities for more frequent contact with students in local schools throughout the state.

Commendations:

1. Expertise of on campus faculty and outreach consultants has been enhanced through participation in the Stephen F. Austin Masters program in visual impairments. NAC

Recommendations:

1. Outreach consultants should receive more in-service training about early childhood development and the impact of visual impairment during child development. (PI 3, 10) CEASD
2. Continue to make sure that staff certification is tracked annually to ensure that the school is in compliance with all state education certification and endorsement regulations. NAC

Standard VIII--Administration

Principle:

The basic responsibility for the administration of the school rests upon the principal or school director. The principal should supervise the instructional program, coordinate all activities of the school, furnish leadership to set and achieve goals to improve the educational program, and carry out the necessary administrative procedures.

Visitation Response:

CEASD - The visiting team members interviewed the Superintendent, Financial Officer, Principal and supervisors. The school is facing typical problems expected to be found in a small school for the deaf including: future reductions in numbers of students, budgets that restrict services available to serve students, increased paper work, recruitment and retention of staff as well as other issues.

The Superintendent works with the Board to provide a program demonstrating the integrity, effectiveness and reputation of the organization. The Superintendent's duties include providing a productive work environment, open and timely communication opportunities and leadership in dealing with current issues and future planning.

This standard covered teacher preparation in two major domains that make up the scope of MSDB's educational services. One, the school situated in Great Falls provides for educational instruction in classrooms and where applicable in collaboration with neighboring public schools. The center school has all the key components needed to serve D/deaf and hard of hearing students as required by student IEP's. Reviews of Personnel Manual, evaluation forms and other documents indicate that MSDB has established an infrastructure which enables MSDB to achieve its mission as a special purpose school.

As with other rural states, Student Outreach services is increasingly becoming a viable option parents of deaf or hard of hearing students to consider. For the sake of meeting the needs of this target population, adequate funding is needed for further program expansion and diversification. Currently, the MSDB administration has found ways to reach out to families through 4 programs delineated here:

- Early Childhood Services (0-5 age group)
- Evaluation, Assessments and Referrals
- Public School Outreach
- School Library and Resource

MSDB's outreach program at this time, serves 286 children (99 deaf and hard-of-hearing and 187 blind and visually-impaired). While there is definitely room for growth, a good working infrastructure has been set in place.

NAC - The responsibility for public education lies with the Superintendent, Dean of Students, Principal, Supervising Teachers, Supervising Counselors, Supervising Outreach Consultant and Outreach Staff. The School recognizes that whenever staff or administration are interacting with the public there is always the need and opportunity for public education and demonstration of educational leadership.

Commendations:

1. The administration is commended for developing a trusting and open communication atmosphere at MSDB. CEASD
2. The budget proposal being submitted for the new biennium shows evidence of responding to the needs of the staff and students. New programs or increased funding requests are based upon supportive data. CEASD
3. MSDB, despite limited funding for outreach, has managed to establish and provide services for newborn infants and toddlers by contracting with Parent Advisors. CEASD
4. There is an outstanding summer program, Family Learning Weekend, that brings families from the 4 corners of this very large state to learn more about the needs of their deaf or hard of hearing child. CEASD
5. The MSDB administration has been very effective at forging strong partnerships with public schools and other state and private organizations. This network serves to improve services to students with vision loss statewide. NAC
6. The administration is working with the Department of Health to create and maintain a database that will allow tracking of deaf and hard of hearing and students with vision loss from initial identification through their school years. NAC

Recommendations:

For Statewide Outreach Services: CEASD

1. The development of clearly articulated interagency agreements is recommended to ensure timely referrals for outreach services for newborn infants detected with hearing loss.
2. Consider the development of communication plans for children based on their communication abilities so MSDB can properly consult for instruction based on student needs at the public school.
3. The state legislature should provide funding to support an increase in staffing so

that deaf and hard of hearing children can benefit from services from public school outreach. MSDB should pursue the development of a fee for service model to increase frequency of services where needed, if the legislature is unable to come up with new funds.

4. MSDB's Outreach Program to public schools should also consider the development of social-emotional development activities for deaf and hard of hearing children. Peers can congregate in regions and engage in character development type of experiences. Sensitivity workshops should be planned and provided for the hearing peers who take classes with deaf and hard of hearing children.
5. Another area of potential growth is in the area of parent collaboration. The formation of statewide parent association is suggested for on-going networking.
6. In the event that MSDB gets the needed funding to increase its capacity in outreach services, responsibilities of consultants should become more specialized by age groups, i.e.: early childhood intervention consultants, k-12 public school outreach consultants, transition planning consultants.

Standard IX--Teacher Load

Principle:

Student to teacher ratio is a crucial element in ensuring effective education. Standards which define adequate ratios are necessary to protect this principle. There are many desirable educational objectives that can only be achieved through close personal interaction between teachers and students and class loads have a direct impact upon the achievement of these goals.

Visitation Response:

The student-to-teacher ratio is well within the recommended standard for class load.

Commendations:

1. Through persistent and cooperative efforts MSDB has recently acquired three new consultants enabling them to reduce caseloads and increase the frequency of services to students. NAC

Recommendations:

Standard X--Student Activities

Principle:

Effective education includes support activities that supplement the basic instructional program by providing additional interests and experiences for learning to take place.

Visitation Response:

Students at MSDB have to opportunity to partake in a wide variety of student activities provided by the school to achieve the on-going development of the whole person through the residential program and co-curricular activities.

Commendations:

1. MSDB's performing troupe, Expressions of Silence, is both an asset and a testimony to the school's ability to develop the whole child. This group represents one of the best ways to provide a positive image of the school. CEASD
2. MSDB has shown the capacity to come up with creative ways to provide for after school activities to benefit its students. By establishing cooperative programs with the Great Falls Central Catholic High School MSDB students continue to have opportunities to participate in all kinds of interscholastic and co-curricular activities. CEASD
3. Communication between the schools and the cottage staff has improved considerably through the use of emails this year. Teachers and Cottage Counselors exchange information related to student work and behavior as needed. CEASD
4. Students have access to a wide variety of community as well as on campus activities. NAC

Recommendations:

1. In order to foster a sense of ownership of governance and planning of student life activities by students in the residential cottage program, the formation of a student based organization enabling students to develop the capacity to advocate for themselves such as a "Cottage Council" is suggested. CEASD

Standard XI—Business Practices

Principle:

The school has financial resources to provide services to students to meet the stated purposes of the school and to provide the educational program to the student. Proper budgetary procedures and acceptable accounting principles are followed for all school funds and are independently audited. Any costs associated with attending the school, including instruction, textbooks, materials, and instructional services are made known to the students at the time of application or enrollment. All advertising and promotional literature is completely truthful and ethical.

Visitation Response:

CEASD - As a state owned and operated program, MSDB is monitored and audited on a regular basis and the team had the opportunity to review such audits and interview the administrator responsible for maintaining all fiscal records.

NAC - MSDB has a very successful financial development program carried out through the MSDB Foundation. The Foundation is the responsibility of a six member Development, Public Relations and Grants Committee currently chaired by Mr. Bob Deming. This committee works in conjunction with the five-member Finance Committee of the Foundation board to coordinate expense and revenue items for the annual capitol and operating budgets. The Superintendent is the Executive Director of the Foundation and is a member Development, Public Relations and Grants Committee.

The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind is an executive branch agency of state government. Funding for the school is provided by legislative appropriations. Appropriations are established and authorized by fund type (general fund, state special revenue, student, and federal). Financial practices center around generally accepted accounting principles in recording expenditures and revenues by fund type on the Statewide Accounting Budgeting and Human Resource System (SABHRS).

The Office of Legislative Auditor conducts a financial compliance audit of school records every two years. All audit comments were resolved.

Commendations:

1. MSDB recently sought and received additional state funding. CEASD
2. The School has developed a close working relationship with the MSDB Foundation and has used the generous resources provided by the Foundation in meaningful ways to benefit students. CEASD

3. The Foundation has assets of \$2,221,000. About \$200,000 in grants and donations are made to the school each year from the Foundation. NAC
4. The MSDB Foundation has, through careful management of its assets, consistently provided major funding for technology, in-service training, recreation, and special projects and events for the students and their families. NAC

Recommendations:

1. MSDB should aggressively seek a permanent solution to the salary (primarily teachers) inadequacies which it has identified. CEASD
2. MSDB should continue to pursue funding and authority to develop and provide a state-wide quality early intervention program for newly identified deaf and blind infants. CEASD
3. MSDB might explore more creative ways to benefit from the services which the Foundation could offer. These services could include Marketing/Public Relations toward a focused audience within Montana. CEASD

End of Report